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Victory of Suffering



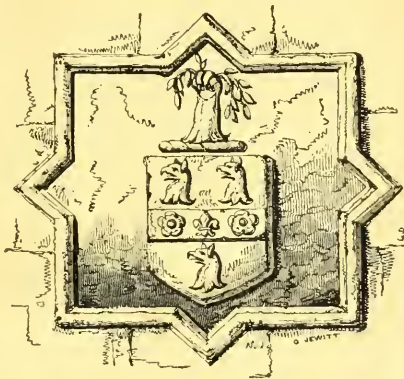
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THE
VICTORY OF SUFFERING:

A PRIZE POEM.

RECITED IN RUGBY SCHOOL,

JUNE 10, MDCCCXLII.



RUGBY:
PRINTED BY J. S. CROSSLEY.

1842.

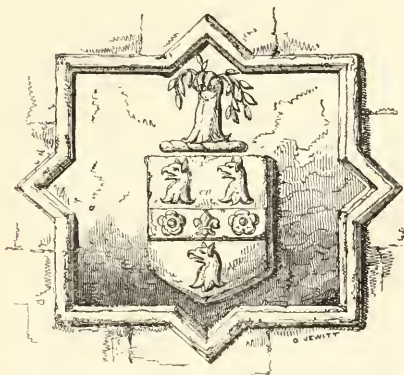


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THE VICTORY OF SUFFERING.

Ἐὼν οὐκ ἦν ἄξιος ὁ κόσμος.—HEB. xi. 38.

Αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ νίκη ἣ νικήσασα τὸν κόσμον.—1 JOHN v. 4.

I.

On for that Spirit, whose unearthly power
Once deigned to rest on Patmos' desert clime,
When the dire secrets of the future hour,
Those years of gloom, and misery, and crime,
Yet hidden in the darkling womb of Time,
Burst on his view, who, though forlorn and lone,
Borne on the wing of Ecstasy sublime,
Had seen in cloudless day his Maker's throne—
The Saviour's best-beloved—the blest Apostle John!

II.

'Twas his, from earth and earth's allurements far,
To view the Lord of glory face to face;—
To watch that heavenly Mind, as, like a star,
It hastened to fulfil its destined race,
Then sought in Heaven a happier dwelling-place:
And, when that Vision faded from his eyes,
By calm endurance for himself to trace
A longer, humbler journey to the skies,
And thus at length attain his calling's glorious prize.

III.

Long time the world had lain in deepest gloom,
 Bowed low in dust by Superstition's chain:
 Man's being, from the cradle to the tomb,
 Seemed nought save sin, and helplessness, and pain:
 Lo where the shades of darkness dimly wane—
 The light has dawned—Messiah long foretold
 Has come in spotless innocence to reign;—
 'Mid that dark world He yet will find a fold,—
 And wildered mortals hail another Age of Gold.

IV.

Yet not undimmed that heavenly light must shine:
 E'en now the glorious struggle is begun:
 E'en now the grisly fiends of night combine
 To cloud the dawn of Righteousness' bright Sun:
 And shall we lose that prize, so dearly won?
 Shall the strong trust of Hope's sure anchor fail?
 Rest, waverer, rest on Israel's Holy One:
 What though the gates of Hell thy rock assail,
 Cast all thy care on Him: His grace shall still prevail.

V.

Hence the pure triumph of endurance springs,
 The glorious VICTORY OF SUFFERING: hence
 Man learns to rise above created things
 And spurn this grosser world of time and sense:
 Not theirs the meed, who, blind to Providence
 'Mid Nature's ruin win their desperate way,
 Prepared to seize the skies by violence,
 While the pale gods above, in mute dismay,
 Behold their frantic course, yet lack the power to stay.^a

^a Alluding to the notion of the Hindus, that it was possible by frequent penances to obtain unlimited power even over the Gods.

"I have seen Indra tremble at his prayers,
 And at his dreadful penances turn pale."

Southey—Curse of Kchama.

VI.

Nor theirs, who, seeking converse all their own,
 Have bid for solitude the world farewell;
 Who mutter o'er the frequent orison
 In the dark precincts of a cloistered cell:
 O'er them no passion weaves its quickening spell,
 No earth-born charm the deadened spirit cloy:
 Long, long for them has tolled the parting knell
 Of all their mortal woes, their mortal joys,
 And cold seclusion's touch each lingering tie destroys.

VII.

What though your Saviour bore the cross and crown,
 Think not, O think not, He with favouring eyes
 From Heaven, enthroned in majesty, looks down
 On those who seek a passport to the skies
 By self-wrought pain, and stern austerities:
 Go, learn what means that heaven-implanted word,
 "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice:"
 Then be your tears, your prayers, in secret poured:
 A broken, contrite heart Thou wilt not scorn, O Lord!

VIII.

Still burns the struggle; still the gates of Hell
 Assail that Rock whereon our Church is raised:
 Though Satan from his throne like lightning fell,
 Once more again that deadly flame has blazed:
 And He, the Saviour, who so lately gazed
 With pitying eye, Jerusalem, on thee;
 Thy royal Lord, with loud Hosannas praised,
 Must bear thy sins upon the accursed tree,
 And change His life of pain for death and Calvary.

IX.

Lo where He kneels—His hands are lifted up :
 Fast stream the tear-drops from that sacred eye ;
 “ Father, remove this last, this bitter cup—
 Yet, if thou wilt, I drink it, and I die : ”
 Heard ye that groan which thrilled through earth and sky ?
 Saw ye the blood that oozed from every pore ?
 ’Tis the last pang of Nature’s agony ;
 The turf whereon He kneels is wet with gore ;
 Yet this is holy ground : approach it and adore.

X.

See o’er yon dim horizon’s dreary face
 The clouds of gathering night all darkly lower ;
 From the dire covert of his dwelling-place
 Forth comes the Prince of Air’s infuriate power :
 Hell’s angry spirits hold their festal hour ;—
 Yet trust, ye saints, the pledge your Surety gave :
 Harsh is the bud, yet sweet will be the flower ;
 Look to the Cross ; e’en now He dies to save :
 E’en now, while bleeding there, He triumphs o’er the grave.

XI.

Lo, the vast sky in one dread chaos blent ;—
 The voice of Nature swells the general wail :
 Earth yawns beneath, to her foundations rent ;—
 All severed hangs the Temple’s mystic veil ;—
 Unbodied shapes, in semblance wan and pale,
 Are hovering round those walls, revealed to sight :
 Yet fear no ill : His Word can never fail ;
 Though heaviness endure for one short night,
 Yet joy will beam again with morn’s returning light.

XII.

Alas! another sun has dawned and set;
 Another night is waning o'er our fears;
 Swift roll the hours: the Saviour lingers yet,
 Nor hastes to dry the fountain of our tears:
 Hark to those sounds that bless their listening ears—
 "Why seek your living Lord among the dead?
 Oh slow to trust the voice of Israel's seers!
 He is not here, but risen, as He said:
 Come, see the place of rest wherein His frame was laid."

XIII.

The fight is won: the trial-moment past,
 The "Agony of Prophecy" is o'er;
 Far 'neath Messiah's feet his foes are cast;
 He rises from the dead, to die no more:
 Now, now awake, your strains of rapture pour,
 Ye hosts of heaven, now sweep your golden strings;
 Lift up, lift up the everlasting door!
 He comes, the Saviour comes, the King of kings,
 Raised from the house of death with healing in his wings.

XIV.

But other martyrs rise, to gem the scene,
 And follow in the path their Master trod:
 There Stephen stands with mild angelic mien,
 Frail as a man, yet stedfast as a god:^b
 There slowly travels o'er the thorny road,
 His calm eye fixed upon the things above,
 Meek Polycarp: till, freed from its abode
 The stainless spirit, like a snow-white dove
 Wings its unsullied way to Him whose name is Love.

^b Verè magnum habere fragilitatem hominis, securitatem dei.—
Seneca.

XV.

There 'mid the waste survey yon victor train,
 The glorious first-fruits of a Saviour's blood,
 Like stars all "marshalled on the nightly plain,"
 A noble army of the great and good;
 These are the righteous few, who boldly stood
 With dauntless brow 'mid Persecution's flame;
 On, on they move—they stem the chilly flood,
 They quit the godless world of sin and shame,
 And join the tuneful choirs that hymn the Sufferer's name.

XVI.

And there is war in heaven: the withering sound
 Of deadly conflict shakes the etherial sky:
 A little while—with many a fetter bound
 All crushed and pierced the powers of evil lie:
 Now, now hath dawned the dayspring from on high,
 The Lord of Hosts hath visited His Vine;
 And louder swells the shout of victory,
 Where the bright Cross, the Christian's conquering sign,
 Beams o'er thy sacred head, imperial Constantine!

XVII.

A blissful stillness reigns in earth and air;
 All hushed and tranquil lies the glassy deep;
 Yet many a stormy cloud is lowering there,
 As it would rouse the giant from his sleep:
 Haak! 'tis the unreined tempest's maddening sweep,
 And far and wide the rolling thunders peal:
 Once more o'er guilt of man the angels weep;
 Once more th' infatuate rage of bigot zeal
 Imbrues in Christian blood the fratricidal steel.

XVIII.

There wrapped in flame th' unshrinking martyr prays:
 His wasted limbs are fettered to the stake:
 O'er his pale brow high waves the streaming blaze:
 He suffers all for his Redeemer's sake:
 The faithless ties of earth around him break:
 Before his glance the fading world retires:
 New joys, new transports in his bosom wake:
 He walks unharmed amid the circling fires,
 And as the flesh decays, the soul to Heaven aspires.

XIX.

And there are martyrs who have never bled:
 No limbs of theirs with bloody stripes are torn:
 To stand unmoved, when on the drooping head
 Beats the cold torrent of contemptuous scorn,
 This is their cross of shame, their crown of thorn:
 Yet they but run the course their Master ran:
 Theirs is a God who comforts them that mourn:
 His still small voice prevails o'er Nature's ban:
 Their weapon is His word, His Name their talisman.

XX.

But we are wedded to the things of clay;—
 We mark the signs that fire the lurid sky,
 Yet faint and linger on our heavenward way,
 Seeking some Zoar, whither we may fly,
 Lest evil overtake us, and we die;
 Like the dry bones in Chebar's^c valley spread,
 Cheered by no wind, our souls all withered lie:
 For us behold no saving unction shed,
 No breath from Heaven appears, to animate the dead.

^c Ezekiel received his visions on the banks of the Chebar in Mesopotamia.

XXI.

Oh happy they, who live not to behold
 The fiery trial of those latter days,
 When darkness shall abound, and love wax cold,
 Till every soul be lost in error's maze !
 Oh happier yet, whose faith with purer rays
 'Mid threatening pains shall burn, nor know a chill,
 A shining beacon 'mid the gathering haze ;
 Who, like the palm,^d bowed down by many an ill,
 O'er the low things of earth rise higher, loftier still !

XXII.

Hark ! 'tis the last dire trumpet's awful sound
 Heard through the silent caverns of the dead :
 Each soul, erewhile in iron slumber bound,
 Springs in pale terror from his narrow bed :
 Now, now approach, and hear your sentence read,
 Ye, through life's term content to seek your own :
 The seal is set : what means that start of dread ?
 What giant woe called forth that general groan ?
 Or whence that anguished gaze, still bent upon the throne ?

XXIII.

Ye too draw near, ye white-robed martyr train ;—
 Draw near—behold your Judge, your Saviour speak :
 Come, ye who bore on earth your load of pain,
 The humble poor, the penitent, the meek,
 Whose care was still the things above to seek :
 Ye who in sight of men confessed my name,
 Making your life one constant Passion Week :
 Ye bore the Cross, regardless of the shame ;
 Haste to that blest abode, whence first your being came.

^d The branches of the palm are said to rise higher in proportion as the weight laid upon them is increased.

XXIV.

No more shall rise the cry of martyrs killed,
The voice of blood from earth's foundations shed:
No more their souls shall linger unfulfilled,
But all in glory shall be perfected,
One faithful flock beneath one common Head:
And now let joy all human sorrows drown:
Henceforth captivity is captive led,
Enough—ye bore for me the world's dread frown,
And ye shall wear with me the Sufferer's conquering crown.

THE END.

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